

IMPACTS OF ALTERNATIVE C

VISITOR EXPERIENCE/ INTERPRETATION/EDUCATION

This alternative would provide visitors with the most comprehensive interpretation of the lower Mississippi Delta region's history. The seven cultural heritage centers would present visitors a clear and unified interpretation of the region's varied stories and resources, from prehistory to the present, and would provide visitors the opportunity to understand and appreciate interrelationships between the region's history and its resources, in a way unparalleled in the other alternatives. In addition, the information and orientation services at the cultural heritage centers would also help visitors know where and how to experience the various story elements of the lower Mississippi Delta region, for example by providing the opportunity to compare resources within different communities. The interrelated interpretation and educational opportunities provided would both increase and enhance the variety and quality of experiences available to visitors throughout the region.

Local residents would be able to take advantage of interpretive and educational programs offered at the heritage centers. There would be increased opportunities for community outreach programs involving the lower Delta region's cultural, natural, and scenic resources. Increased appreciation for these resources could help ensure their long-term preservation.

RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

Cultural Resources

The seven proposed heritage centers would be located in adaptively rehabilitated historic structures, if possible. Though the overall impact of adaptive reuse would be the continued preservation of the structures, the use of any historic structure could result in the loss of historic fabric that is too deteriorated to be rescued and that must be replaced to preserve the structure or to allow the structure to serve a public function. Materials that were removed, however,

would be evaluated to determine their value for either museum collections or for their comparative use in future preservation work. In addition, a focused program of research and maintenance would not only continue to preserve these historic properties but also would contribute to and help perpetuate the historic character of surrounding landscapes. Should circumstances dictate that any or all of the heritage centers occupy new buildings, however, the heritage centers, and their associated parking areas, waysides, and access roads, would be appropriately sited and designed to minimize impacts to cultural resources.

The responsibility for preserving many of the Delta region's cultural resources would primarily lie with the newly created Lower Mississippi Delta Heritage Commission and local governments, organizations, and citizens. Preservation efforts could continue to be fragmented and uncoordinated, due to limited technical assistance and inadequate funding; however, the numerous cultural resource studies proposed, if implemented, would provide the information necessary to better manage and protect the resources and to properly evaluate impacts of proposed actions in future environmental analyses. All cultural resource studies would be conducted in association with the appropriate state historic preservation offices and other interested state, local, and private agencies and organizations, and in cooperation with appropriate landowners and residents.

Another potential benefit of the proposed cultural resource studies includes continuing ongoing consultations with Native American Indians and other ethnographic groups, which could identify strategies for preserving and safeguarding cultural significant sites and resources. Efforts could be undertaken to identify and document oral traditions, lifeways, genealogies, and the complex interracial and intercultural relationships of the region's peoples, which are of ongoing significance to contemporary racial and ethnic groups throughout the United States.

Additional benefits could also accrue to those cultural resources that currently have no preservation efforts underway. The burgeoning information available regarding the lower Delta region's varied cultural resources could result not only in increased visitation but also increased public awareness and appreciation of the resources, resulting in the encouragement of preservation efforts and possibly additional revenue for resource preservation. Higher levels of visitation, though, could result in increased incidences of vandalism, more wear and tear on historic structures, or the overuse of adjacent grounds and landscapes, which could necessitate increased management of the visitor experience. The potential risk, however, is far outweighed by the potential benefits of preserving neglected and deteriorating resources.

Natural Resources

The seven proposed heritage centers would be located in existing structures, if possible. In most situations, the rehabilitation of historic structures would primarily affect disturbed vegetation types and habitats. Should circumstances dictate that the any or all of the heritage centers occupy new buildings, however, the heritage centers, and their associated parking areas, waysides, access roads, and signs would be appropriately sited and designed to minimize impacts to natural resources. If possible, for example, the heritage centers would be erected on previously disturbed lands, so as not to adversely impact biological diversity, wetlands, or floodplains. Should construction occur in the vicinity of streams and rivers, all activities would be conducted in strict compliance with state and federal regulations and standards, which would minimize both the sediment loads and vehicle related pollutants introduced into waterways. In addition, both the development of management plans and careful operation of the facilities would ensure that visitation is adequately managed without degradation of nearby natural resources.

A temporary degradation of air quality from increased vehicle emissions and an increase

in noise would occur during construction, as a result of activities to either rehabilitate existing buildings or build new facilities and develop or improve parking and roads. Construction activities and increased vehicle traffic on unpaved roads could also temporarily increase airborne dust and slightly reduce visibility. Over the long term, pollutant concentrations from vehicle emissions might escalate in communities because of increased visitation.

Beneficial impacts could accrue from the implementation of applicable sustainable design practices, such as the proper disposal of onsite hazardous materials and the use of nonhazardous materials in facility design and construction. Such practices would not only provide for visitor and employee safety but could potentially lead to the removal of contaminants in soils, the improvement of local surface and groundwater quality, and the improvement of conditions for vegetation and wildlife.

It is unknown how many resource sites associated with the lower Delta region have the capacity to accommodate increased visitation without incurring resource degradation. For example, nearby soils could be compacted and adjacent vegetation destroyed by increased visitor use. However, any adverse resource impacts to soils, vegetation, wildlife, and water and air quality would be minimal due to the relatively limited extent of land potentially affected and because many sites lie within existing disturbed areas.

Additional programs or measures to help protect or restore natural and scenic resources on either private or public land could be developed in conjunction with the cultural heritage centers. In addition, the beneficial impacts of implementing this alternative would include some level of protection for those natural resources that are associated with cultural resources proposed for preservation.

FACILITY DEVELOPMENT

The seven cultural heritage centers would contribute to their surrounding communities both as an employer and as a consumer of goods and services. A staff would be required to both operate and maintain the facilities. Construction and/or rehabilitation of existing buildings and associated site improvements would require a contractor with a large staff and crew. During construction, additional food service, housing, and supplies would be necessary if the contractor is not from the local area. If a local contractor is used, little new economic benefit would accrue beyond the continued employment of existing workers during the construction period.

Increased visitation to the cultural heritage centers could create additional automobile traffic on rural and urban roads and highways. Urban congestion, remoteness, or the reliance on narrow, two-lane roads could make some centers difficult to access. Ultimately, there could be a need to increase the capacity of some roads, particularly in rural areas, to allow safe and efficient access to the cultural heritage centers. Additional demands for municipal services, such as road and street maintenance and law enforcement, could also occur in some communities. If transpiration and other infrastructure improvements are needed, however, local and state tax revenues from increased tourism could offset a portion of the costs.

Increased tourism could generate increased income for local businesses and could create a need for more overnight accommodations, restaurants, and other commercial establishments in the communities surrounding the cultural heritage centers, particularly if the centers are located in rural areas. Sensitive planning, however, would ensure that the siting of these additional facilities does not degrade the cultural, natural, or recreational resources that are integral to the character of the lower Mississippi Delta region.

Residents in the vicinity of the cultural heritage centers might experience some disruption to their daily lifestyles from the

introduction of more visitors to the area. In addition to increased traffic congestion, effects could include the general invasion of privacy, increased noise, and potential trespass by visitors. Such intrusions would likely be more noticeable if any of the centers were located in rural areas, where noise and human activity would be typically less. However, site planning and design that is sensitive to local lifestyle and property owner issues would reduce the potential for major impacts to residents.

MANAGEMENT APPROACH

The formalized management structure of the Delta Heritage Center Task Force would tightly define each participant's responsibilities, making both the organization of diverse groups of individuals and organizations and the coordination of projects and initiatives for such a large and complex area more efficient. At the same time, the potential for jurisdictional disputes would be minimized. In addition, the task force, a new federal commission, could promote new federal expenditures at a time when many established federal programs are underfunded. The task force should also prove successful in driving economic revitalization, spurring private investment, and generating community pride.

Like the partnership and commission described in alternatives A and B, respectively, the task force would initiate grassroots support for heritage tourism and resource preservation throughout the lower Delta region. Such constituency and consensus-building would help ensure the long-term momentum of any proposed initiatives. The task force would also allow for the more effective use of existing federal programs by providing a focus for funneling money and energy that otherwise might be dispersed in different, and perhaps contradictory, directions throughout the region.

Federal funding to be made available for constructing each heritage center would be \$3 million (\$21 million total). The staffing and maintenance costs would be borne by each state.